

UNDERSTANDING READERS, TEXTS, AND TEACHING

*Reading has always been
my sustenance,
my great joy.*

—ANNA QUINDLEN

Readers love books. They buy them, enjoy them, and treasure them. Books help readers understand their world and themselves. Our ultimate goal as teachers is to help each student in our schools become a reader who loves books and all they have to offer. Reading is more than basic decoding competency. It has the potential to nourish the intellect, the emotions, and the spirit. It feeds and replenishes the art and skill of writing. A child who lives a literate life in school and has pleasurable experiences with written language will make a place for reading and writing throughout life.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A READER?

Think of yourself as a reader. You carry books with you all the time, and you are constantly buying more. During a pause in your day, you are likely to pick up a newspaper, a magazine, even a piece of advertising. You refer frequently to books, borrowing the language you find there. You notice words in texts and sometimes search for printed words that fit, express, or extend your feelings.

Reading sustains you on long and tedious airline flights, bus rides, or train trips. You gobble up some books, tearing through them as quickly as you can. Others, you savor, reading a few pages at a time and then thinking and even talking to someone about the ideas you find there. Still others, you dip into for particular purposes, to get information or to learn a skill. When you share a whole text or a brief section of it with someone else by reading the words aloud, you modulate your phrasing to help your listener fully understand not only the text but also your own interpretation of it.

You visit bookstores frequently, not so much as a busy, task-oriented shopper but as a dedicated browser. You

always leave a bookstore with a few more purchases than you intended. Often you read a book simply because it is connected to something you have previously found interesting—the topic, author, or style of writing.

You are always on the lookout for a new book to love; you write down titles and authors generated by Internet searches. Sometimes you see a book and buy it instantly, without even looking through it, because you know and love the writer or a good friend found it wonderful. You know how to get information from books. You give books as gifts and like to receive books yourself. You have a library card (or at least you have fond memories of childhood days spent in libraries); you probably have a frequent-customer card from a bookstore. You always have unread books in your house that you are saving up for vacations. While driving, you listen to books on tape. There are books by your bed, by your favorite chair, in the kitchen, in your car. You converse with others about particular authors, titles, and genres. You see films based on books, but you always try to read the book first and usually like it better! You create visual images of characters in books; some, you feel you know. You have some favorite books; you reread them over the years.

You seldom think about your own reading process. To you, the print, the words, even the language, are almost transparent. You may appreciate language or notice interesting words, but the way you read allows you to connect directly with the ideas being conveyed. Books and other forms of written language are simply a part of your life. Above all, ~~reading means using your mind, asking ques-~~
~~tions, challenging the status quo, absorbing information~~
~~with a critical eye.~~ You see that being a reader is a critical challenge and an essential responsibility in a democratic way of life.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE LITERATE?

No doubt many of the above characteristics resonate with you: they are about reading ability but also about reading habits, attitudes, and interests. No one can be deeply connected to written language unless the experience of reading, over time, has been meaningful and often intensely gratifying. A highly literate person is constructing meaning all the time while anticipating reading, during reading, during pauses from reading, and after reading—sometimes long after. A real reader tends to recall books read many years before and sometimes brings new understanding to those texts in the context of the present. Thus, we cannot speak of comprehension as simply the “product” or even the “goal” of reading. Comprehension is the vital center of the broader and more complex ability to use

Literacy comprises a network of in-the-head processes that enable the reader to pick up all kinds of information from the text and construct the author’s intended meaning. *Comprehending* is actively making meaning using this kind of in-the-head problem solving. All the complex operations of the brain before, during, and after reading a text—cognitive, linguistic, sensory-motor, emotional, artistic, and creative—are operating as readers process texts.

In *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, Patricia Polacco describes a lonely little girl who cannot read until a very kind and effective teacher notices her strengths and teaches her. From the moment that Mr. Peters showed his third graders the cover of this book (which shows a frustrated little girl frowning at a book and a teacher looking thoughtfully at her), students had something to think about. For example, some concluded that the teacher was making the student do hard schoolwork. Yet, questioned another, “Why would the title say ‘thank you’?” Literacy, in all its complexity, was underway.

An interchange between Mr. Peters and his third graders later in the reading is shown in Figure 1-1. Stopping to invite student interaction, Mr. Peters prompted a “comprehension conversation” instead of administering a “comprehension check.” Nevertheless, he found out how at least some students were thinking about the text, and everyone was able to benefit from one another’s thinking.

DISCUSSION OF
Thank You, Mr. Falker, BY PATRICIA POLACCO

MR. PETERS: (READING) *“One evening they lay on the grass together and counted the lights from heaven. You know, her grandma said, ‘all of us will go there someday. Hang on to the grass, or you’ll lift right off the ground, and there you’ll be!’*

They laughed, and both hung on to the grass.

But it was not long after that night that her grandma must have let go of the grass, because she went to where the lights were, on the other side. And not long after that, Trisha’s grandpa let go of the grass, too.

“School seemed harder and harder now.” [p. 9]

Patricia Polacco is telling something about Trisha’s grandmother and grandfather, but she’s not saying it directly. Do you know what she means, though, by “letting go of the grass?”

JULIA: Did they die?

MR. PETERS: What does everyone think of that? What makes you think so?

JOSH: It said “heaven” before, and that would be the other side.

JULIA: Why didn’t she say they died?

MR. PETERS: Maybe the writer thought that would be an interesting way to say it.

KARA: Or maybe it really happened and she knew somebody who really did that and said that.

MR. PETERS: Maybe she was trying to help us know how she really felt about her grandparents.

JULIA: And that she was sad when they let go and everything seemed sad.

MR. PETERS: It does have a sad sound to it, doesn’t it? And then listen (READS), “School seemed harder and harder now.” I wonder why.

JOSH: Trish was getting older, so they had harder work, and she didn’t have anyone to help her.

KARA: It might not really be harder, but she didn’t have her grandmother and grandfather to make her feel good, and all the kids were teasing her.

JULIA: Because she couldn’t read. I think letting go of the grass sounds better than dying—not as sad.

JOSH: Maybe everything just seemed harder after they died.

Figure 1-1. Discussion of *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, by Patricia Polacco

Still later the text tells about Trisha's move to California, where she meets Mr. Falker, a teacher who helps her learn to read. Mr. Peters chose another place to pause and invite conversation. The students' discussion covered not only the idea that Mr. Falker is kind to the girl and makes the other students stop teasing her but also that he thinks she is smart and brave to be able to compensate so cleverly. ~~The idea that someone can be really smart and not good at something like reading is an important concept.~~

For these third graders, comprehending *Thank You, Mr. Falker* involved thinking deeply about the events, as demanded by the text. Literal understanding would not have been enough. Polacco's book is more than a story about a child who cannot read and then learns how—although that, in itself, is a great story. Mr. Falker is a hero, not just because he teaches Trisha to read but because through him, Patricia Polacco, Trisha's alter ego, has been able to write and illustrate so many beautiful books for children. Think of the discussion that might follow this last sentence of the book:

He hugged me and asked me what I did for a living. "Why, Mr. Falker," I answered. "I make books for children. . . . Thank you, Mr. Falker. Thank you." (p. 35)

We would expect children to appreciate the significance of Polacco's going on to write so many good books for children, which would not have been possible without Mr. Falker. Although the writer did not say so, as readers we know that the "thank you" is not just from Patricia Polacco but from all the readers who have loved her books.

Mr. Peters' third graders supported each other in building more complex understandings while thinking about a text they heard read aloud. Their purpose was not to practice applying a strategy but to understand the girl's problem and its solution. There were no scheduled times to use an assigned strategy; Mr. Peters did not use a list of questions to test their knowledge afterward or ask them to retell the story, but important learning occurred.

~~The act of comprehending a text occurs before, during, and after reading.~~ And not only is the reader thinking about everything that the writer includes in the message but is going well beyond it. A struggling reader (or a former struggling reader), for example, might experience *Thank You, Mr. Falker* in ways that a proficient reader could not

even imagine because he brings a unique set of experiences to the text.

The critical elements of comprehension—the readers, the text, and the teaching (see Figure 1-2)—are evident in Mr. Peters' interchange with his students:

- The *readers* are the listeners, who process the meaning and language of the text in their heads, as well as their teacher, Mr. Peters, who processes the print and reads aloud with fluency. Through the medium of his voice, Mr. Peters uses pauses and emphasis to convey the meaning of the text.
- The *text* consists of Polacco's story as well as the accompanying illustrations, the dedication to Mr. Falker, and the afterword. Processing the text makes demands on the readers/listeners. Readers respond to the text in different ways, of course, because their individual backgrounds are part of the processing system.
- The *teaching* consists of the way Mr. Peters presents the text orally, the places at which he chooses to stop and invite discussion, the demonstration of his own responses, the probing questions he uses to find out what students are thinking, even the way he no doubt refers back to the text or links it to other texts across the year—all the moment-to-moment decisions teachers employ to mediate (intervene) in the reading in a way that does not disrupt but instead enhances students' understanding and enjoyment.

Processing means that readers are engaging in complex systems of strategic, in-the-head actions in response to the demands of text. We cannot see strategic actions, but we can look for evidence that they are occurring in the reader's head. We can look at reading behaviors and hypothesize what the readers are able to do as they think their way through a text. Instruction supports processing, but strategic actions only happen in the heads of individual readers. Here's an itemized breakdown:

- 1 Processing demands are inherent within each written text. For a reader to meet the textual demands means engaging in a complex range of in-the-head actions, including
 - Using visual information from print and graphics.
 - Putting together all the kinds of information in the text to gain its literal meaning.

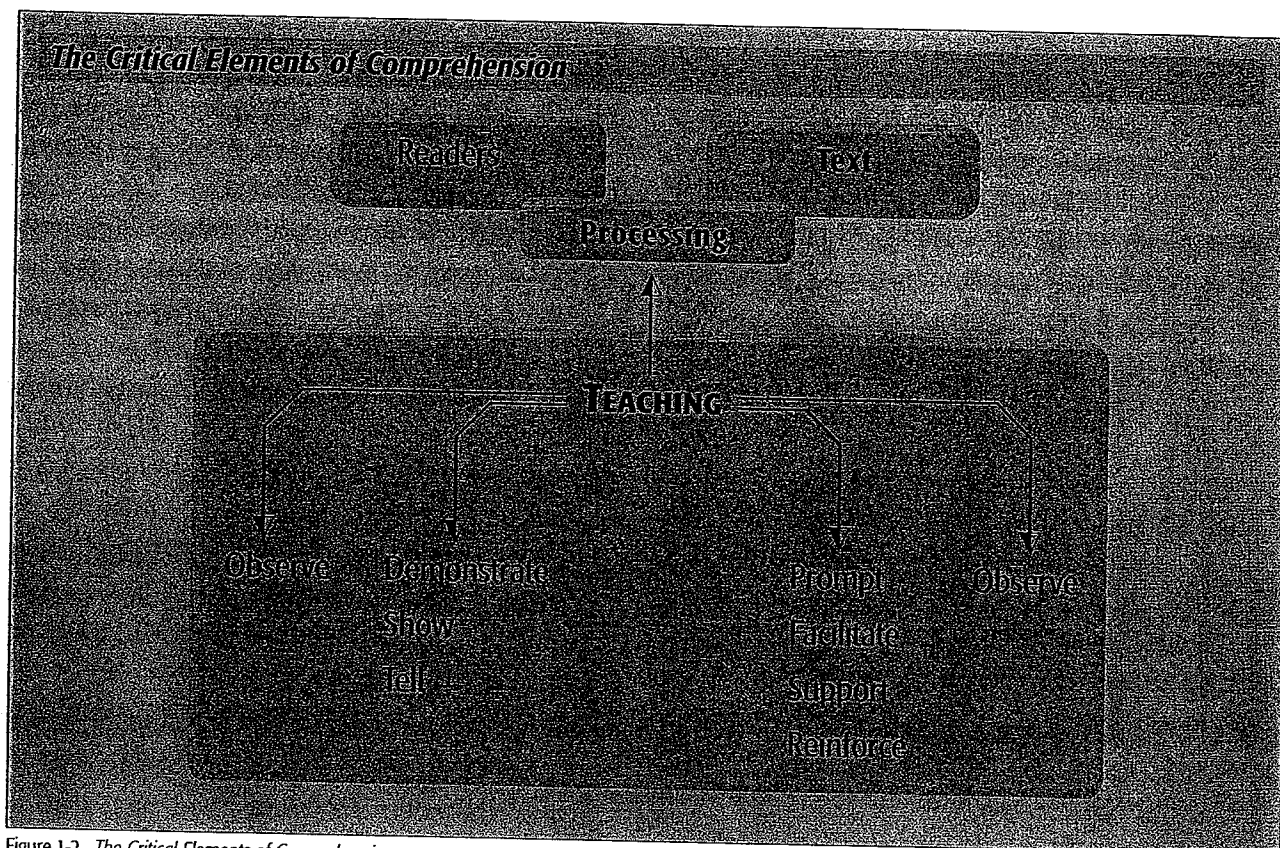


Figure 1-2. *The Critical Elements of Comprehension*

- Remembering the important information while reading and also while thinking beyond the text.
- Sometimes thinking about the quality, structure, or similar aspects of the text (is the language familiar, recognizable, well constructed?).
- 2 Readers respond to these demands in different ways because their own background knowledge is an important part of the processing.
- 3 The teacher supports the processing of the text in a variety of ways, including,
 - Reading aloud with fluency and phrasing.
 - Talking about reading in many different ways.
 - Showing students how texts “work” and giving them information they will need to process or problem-solve the text.
 - Prompting and helping readers to engage in strategic actions.
 - Reinforcing behaviors that evidence students are processing the text in effective ways.

READERS

When we say that the reader is a critical element of the comprehending process, we are not talking about the student’s “level” or “ability.” Instead, we mean ~~the whole of the reader’s prior experience, knowledge of language, and knowledge of the world~~—the reader brings all this to the processing of every single text: the transaction between reader and text results in the ongoing construction of understanding (Rosenblatt 1938/1983, 1978). As Louise Rosenblatt has said,

Terms such as *the reader* are somewhat misleading, though convenient, fictions. There is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are in reality only the potential millions of individual readers or individual literary works. . . . The reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader and a particular text at a particular time under particular circumstances. (1938/1983, p. 34)

We know that reading is both a cognitive and an emotional experience. Interest and motivation play strong roles in

constructing the meaning that readers take from text, and the outcome is somewhat different for every reader.

The act of comprehending a text is also affected by contextual factors, which, again, are different for individuals and even different for the same reader over time. For example, it matters whether you are reading “on the run” for a short time in a crowded place or at home on a long Sunday afternoon, whether the text you are reading helps you connect with your own cultural past or not, whether you have heard people talking about the text or read a review before you read it, whether you have seen the movie first, whether you are expected to take a test on your reading, whether you plan to discuss the text with friends, whether the text discusses a place you have lived or previously visited, and so on. Reading, as a thinking process, is part of everything that happens to you as a person, and comprehending a text is intimately related to your life.

TEXTS

As comprehenders, we seek to meet the demands of whatever texts we decide to read. It is helpful for us as teachers to ask: ~~What does the reader need to know or know how to do to be able to read this text with understanding and fluency?~~ To answer that question, we would need to think about:

- What is the overall meaning of this text?
- What layers of meaning will the reader need to understand?
- Will the reader need to gather information from a variety of places—for example, graphics, illustrations, text body, and glossaries?
- What new or unusual language structures will the reader need to understand?
- What kinds of structural elements both help and represent a challenge to the reader—for example, narrative, flashbacks, “stories within stories,” insets, graphics, categorized lists?
- Are there sophisticated uses of words such as metaphors, similes, and idioms?
- Is there a large number of multisyllable or technical words?
- To what degree is inference required to understand the text?
- Does the text demand that the reader understand below-the-surface uses of language, such as irony?
- What background knowledge or experience is required to understand the text?
- What prior experience with this kind of text (genre, structure, style) is needed to help the reader process it with rich comprehension?
- How many unfamiliar words or words beyond the reader’s present decoding ability are present?

Clearly, assessing the demands of a text is a complex task. As teachers, we are not thinking of the text in isolation but in relation first to readers in general and then to the particular readers we are teaching. Processing involves meeting the emotional as well as the cognitive demands of a text. To richly understand a text like *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, the reader must have empathy for Trisha and a feeling of joy at the final outcome.

Let’s think about how a reader’s response to a text reveals her understandings and how her teacher interacts to “lift” her further thinking. Each week, Haylea and her teacher, Ms. Winkler, exchange letters about books that the students have either read themselves or heard read aloud to the class. This week’s letter includes Haylea’s response to *Because of Winn-Dixie* (DiCamillo) which Ms. Winkler is reading aloud. *Because of Winn-Dixie* is the story of a young girl who moves to a new town. Her loneliness is relieved when she acquires a large friendly dog in the supermarket. Haylea apparently tried to read this book the previous year but abandoned it. As an independent reading choice, she is enjoying *The Secret Garden* (Burnett). Her letter to her teacher (see Figure 1-3) is an opportunity for her to share her thinking about the texts she is reading during the week. What can we learn about Haylea as a reader from the written conversation between Haylea and her teacher Ms. Winkler?

Notice that Ms. Winkler begins her letter to Haylea by responding to a comment Haylea made in last week’s letter that *Because of Winn-Dixie* seems different this year: she asks her to be more specific. She also focuses Haylea’s attention on the writing style of *The Secret Garden*.

Haylea’s response indicates that this interchange is not a “test” but a conversation. She agrees that the way a person reads a book affects comprehension and gives examples to show that she is different this year from last in her understanding of *Because of Winn-Dixie*. She provides some

<p>Dear Haylea,</p> <p>I am glad you enjoy writing letters in your reader's notebook - I enjoy writing back to you! Sometimes it's good to take a break from the things you love. Then you can be refreshed and do your best when you get going again!</p> <p>I have read <u>Because of Winn-Dixie</u> several times and it's always different. Sometimes it's how a person reads a book to you that makes it different. Other times it's the point in your life that you're at when you read the story. Do you think you're different now than you were when you last heard <u>Because of Winn-Dixie</u>? In what ways?</p> <p>I vaguely remember reading <u>The Secret Garden</u> when I was a kid. One of the reasons you might find the language of the book confusing is because it was written a long time ago. Do you see differences between the style of writing in <u>The Secret Garden</u> and contemporary books? Think about Sharon Creech's books - how is her writing different?</p> <p>Love, Ms. Winkler</p>	<p>Dear Ms. Winkler,</p> <p>I do agree that the way a person reads a book, does affect the story. I think I am different from last year because I am more mature, and I see things in a different way. Last year, it seemed to me that <u>Because of Winn-Dixie</u> was just some crazy story, but now it's starting to make sense.</p> <p>I do see different language in books - very different from <u>The Secret Garden</u>! Sharon Creech's books are very different. None of the books I've read so far by her have "thee," "thou," "thy," or "thine" in them. I'm absolutely normal. There's a little of "an's" and that kind of thing, but no old language. I do agree that <u>The Secret Garden</u> is a very old book!</p> <p>I am still reading <u>The Secret Garden</u> and like it very much so far. What I predicted was right! She found the garden. Two new characters are introduced, and, sort of told about the garden. Dickon is now helping her, and Elie realized that the</p>
<p>garden has changed her impact on life, and now I understand more about when you said to write about something that has shaped you, because the garden definitely shaped Mary!</p> <p>Colin is yet another character, disabled and may die. I can connect to him because when I think about dying I get scared. I wonder how he can speak about so often, even though he's scared. Mary has yet seen another thing that has changed her life. Colin is spoiled, like her, and she has seen another version of herself, right before her eyes. I think she doesn't really realize yet, though.</p> <p>I think that <u>Because of Winn-Dixie</u> is a good book. I think maybe something might happen at the party later on to make Opal friends with Amanda, and, possibly, a closer relationship with her father. Maybe they might even find her mother!</p> <p>I used to think that the author named the book, <u>Because of Winn-Dixie</u>, after the dog. But now I sort of</p>	<p>think that she named it after the store, Winn-Dixie. I think so because if Opal hadn't gone to the store, she wouldn't have the dog, and if she didn't have him, then all of the friends she has probably wouldn't be her friends now. I look forward to finding out more!</p> <p>Sincerely, Haylea Erickson</p>

Figure 1-3. Haylea's letters to Ms. Winkler

examples of how a contemporary author, Sharon Creech, writes differently from the way Frances Burnett does in *The Secret Garden* and goes on to discuss how the garden has “shaped” Mary’s character. Interestingly, Haylea shows that she is aware of her own growth as a reader—that is, she recognizes an example in the book that helps her understand her teacher’s advice to write about something that has stimulated her thinking.

TEACHING

There is much debate over whether complex, unseen, unconscious processing can be directly taught. Earlier in this chapter we commented that ultimately it is the individual who must process and interpret the text. But teaching can make a difference by providing support that will help readers simultaneously:

- Process the text with understanding and accuracy.
- Create reasonable interpretations of the ideas in the text.
- Help readers expand their processing powers in a way that transfers to other texts.

As we engage readers with texts, we are always teaching because we are encouraging active thinking; however, we need to recognize that most comprehending occurs implicitly and is highly related to the individual’s own current understandings. We may have to let go of the traditional instruction, which in the past has consisted of a series of questions that emphasize right answers and single interpretations. At the same time, it’s not true that “anything goes.” After all, students are reading a particular text written by an author who has particular meanings in mind. Tierney and Pearson (1994) have addressed this tension:

Consider the notion that accuracy of a reader’s understanding should be regarded as relative. The key point here is that what is considered an appropriate understanding is likely to vary from reader to reader and from context to context. That is, accuracy of understanding is relative and should be considered a function of an individual reader and individual text characteristics, as well as a function of purposes for reading. In constructing an interpretation, a reader selects, inserts, substitutes, deletes, and connects ideas in conjunction with what he or she perceives as “making sense.” And what “makes sense” depends upon the text as well as the reader’s purposes and background knowledge. . . . It would seem that teachers need to respect both authorship and readership. (pp. 509–510)

Tierney and Pearson go on to say that one of the goals of teaching reading comprehension is to help readers recognize students’ interpretations while at the same time instilling in them the responsibility to address the writer’s intentions. Readers must come up with plausible interpretations and be able to justify them with important evidence from the text or from personal experience. The emphasis here is not on “right answers,” but on the reasoning process, which is transferable to their reading of other texts. This focus increases the likelihood that important, rather than trivial, aspects of a text will be noticed.

This kind of reasoning can be promoted by engaging readers in processing and discussing written texts that they hear read aloud or read for themselves. Listening, reading, thinking, talking, drawing, and writing flow across many instructional contexts. In well-designed programs, opportunities for engaging with many texts occur throughout the day.

Figure 1-4 summarizes the ways in which readers process and respond to texts and lists a variety of instructional contexts in which teachers can help children do so.

LISTENING TO TEXTS

Even though listeners are not processing the visual information within the text themselves, in every other way they are actively constructing understanding. They are thinking within, beyond, and about the text. They encounter the text through the oral rendition of written language. When you watch the evening news, for example, most of the time you are processing a text that the announcer is reading aloud to you. Even some of the more conversational segments are scripted. The same is true when you watch films or plays. Making it possible for students to comprehend material without having to process the print and other visual information allows them to direct a huge amount of attention to thinking and feeling. As they listen to a text read aloud, students can think in complex ways about texts that are harder than those they can read independently. Comprehension is even more powerful when students have the opportunity to discuss their reading or to use writing or drawing as a tool to reflect on it.

Interactive Read-Aloud

We call reading aloud to students *interactive* read aloud because the teacher assures the students actively engage in

Engaging with Texts: Listening, Reading, Responding

	DEFINITION	PURPOSE	INSTRUCTIONAL CONTEXTS
Processing Written Texts by Listening Individuals listen to and think about texts that are read aloud to them and discuss the text before, during, and/or after reading.	Listeners pick up information through oral language (written language read aloud) and put it together with what they know. They actively construct meaning and also notice aspects of the text being read (such as language, new ideas, story lines, characters). They select interesting ideas and talk about them with others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make possible thinking and talking about texts without requiring independent processing of print. Expand linguistic, vocabulary, factual, and experiential knowledge. Provide a model of fluent, phrased reading. Improve listening comprehension. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactive read-aloud Literature discussion (before, during, and after hearing texts read aloud) Listening to texts (via tapes, CDs, DVDs, computers, etc.) for various purposes
Processing Written Texts Orally or Silently Individuals read texts for themselves either independently or with teacher support and discuss them after reading.	Readers pick up information from the written text and put it together with what they know. They problem-solve the text using knowledge of any kind (visual, phonological, vocabulary, syntactic, linguistic, factual, experiential). They use multiple sources of information in an integrated way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable readers to build their processing systems as they use a variety of strategic actions. Expand readers' ability to process more challenging texts. Enable readers to work independently on the information in texts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guided reading Shared reading Choral reading Readers' theater Literature discussion (book clubs) Independent reading
Acting on the Meaning of Written Texts After Reading Individuals extend their understanding of texts through a variety of ways of expressing meaning—writing, talking, creating visual products, performing.	Readers or listeners reconsider the text and sometimes revisit parts of it to extend their thinking about the text and express their ideas to others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a deeper understanding of a text. Enable shared perspectives to enrich understanding. Enable close analysis of textual features. Support synthesis of ideas and information. Provide tools to understand text organization and structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactive and shared writing (group story, charts) Independent writing (letters about reading, notes, double-entry diary entries, charts, graphic organizers, book reviews, informational articles, etc.) Extension through visual representation (interactive read-aloud, guided reading, or literature discussion in book clubs) Extension through performance (oral reading, readers' theater, choral reading, drama, etc.) Extension through discussion related to the text or responses to the art.

Figure 1-4 Engaging with Texts

thinking and talking about a text. Brief discussion takes place *before* and *after* reading as well as at a few planned times *during* the reading. Interaction between the teacher and students extends understanding of a text. All participants benefit from the thinking of each other.

Technological Access to Written Language

Technological access to written texts is provided through CDs, DVDs, and audio- and videotapes. Many teachers provide these resources in the classroom and allow students to take them home. In addition, students can access a variety of oral and written texts on the Internet.

Literature Discussion

Even if students cannot read a text independently (or even with teacher support), they can think about and respond to the ideas in it and extend their understanding through discussion with others. Literature discussion can take place in pairs, trios, quartets, or book clubs of various sizes and may focus on material that students have read for themselves, that the teacher has read to them, or that they have heard via technology. (See Chapter 19.)

PROCESSING WRITTEN TEXTS INDEPENDENTLY

As they read texts for themselves, readers process the print, simultaneously thinking about the meaning of the text and generating their own ideas that go well beyond the literal meaning. The reading can be oral or silent. They use multiple sources of knowledge in an integrated way to process texts. Ultimately, the goal is for them to engage in this process in a highly independent way. Several instructional contexts support readers' independent processing of texts.

Independent Reading

Each day, students read self-selected books (at school or at home) that are easy enough for them to read independently. Independent reading should not be considered an exercise. This is the time to get lost in a book. Independent reading gives students the opportunity to practice reading in a smoothly orchestrated way; it is a context in which comprehension is largely unconscious but may be subtly mediated by a teacher's minilesson or reading conference or by sharing with others after reading. It is important for young children to have a time when they reread easy texts independently. (See Chapter 22.)

Guided Reading

Guided reading is small-group instruction that builds each student's ability to process increasingly challenging texts with fluency and understanding. The teacher brings together students who are alike enough in their abilities that they can learn how to read better with the same level of text. The teacher selects a book and, by introducing it and providing support, helps children take on a more difficult text than they could read alone. Through guided reading, teachers can shore up students' use of their background knowledge as they process a new text and help them think in new ways about a text. (See Chapter 24.)

Literature Discussion

When readers know that they are going to be discussing books with others, their independent reading inevitably changes; processing is subtly different. Students may read independently or listen to the text prior to the discussion, but participating in a book club provides a way for students to reflect, reprocess a text, and build a deeper meaning as they benefit from the interpretations of other readers. (See Chapter 20.) They revisit parts of a text to read orally or silently to support their thinking in a discussion.

Shared Reading

When the teacher and children read together in unison from a shared text, readers' processing of print is highly supported. The shared text can be enlarged (in large print on a chart, or projected on a screen), or each person can have a copy. The shared text may be a story, poem, or a text students have produced together through interactive writing, which involves teacher and children "sharing the pen." (See Chapter 21.)

Readers' Theater

Students may perform a text, such as a story, a chapter, or a scene, orally. They reread the text with the goal of using their voices to interpret the meaning of the text. (See Chapter 21.)

Choral Reading

Here, children read in unison, using their voices to reflect the meaning in the text and/or make it rhythmic and artistic. The activity requires fast, automatic processing. Often, alternating passages read by all the voices, small groups of voices, and solo voices contribute to the interpretation and effect of the text. (See Chapter 21.)

ACTING ON THE MEANING OF TEXTS

We can act on the meaning in a text in different ways. Of course, we are always responding to texts, before, during, and after reading them. When we read something sad and have an emotional reaction, we are responding “on the spot.” But teachers help readers extend their understanding through talking, writing, and sometimes drawing about reading. They may also engage students in drama to explore the deeper meaning of a text.

Talking About Reading

Book discussions—in pairs, trios, quartets, or larger groups like the whole class—take place all the time. Students share what they are thinking about their independent reading during literature discussion groups, in guided reading groups, and before, during, and after interactive read-aloud. Talk surrounds reading. Through “text” talk, students share their interpretations with others, but they also change those interpretations by hearing other perspectives and developing a richer understanding. (See Chapter 16.)

Writing About Reading

Many different kinds of writing can help readers expand their thinking about texts. We discuss a range of authentic ways to use writing to explore the meaning of texts in Chapter 28. The letters between Haylea and Ms. Winkler earlier in this chapter (undertaken during the reading workshop) are an example. As another example, while reading aloud, teachers and children can make group charts about almost anything—time lines, story maps, comparisons. The important thing about making charts together is that they are a visual representation of all the talk and thinking that is going on. Readers can make notes, double-entry diary entries, and individual charts. They can use graphic organizers to help them think about texts in different ways. Ideally, these organizers are not used as worksheets to be filled out, but as a tool for talking and thinking about ideas and information and their organization. (See Chapters 27 and 28.)

Extending Understanding Through Drawing

Drawing or sketching can be used effectively to represent one’s thinking about a text in almost any reading context—independent reading, guided reading, literature study, or interactive read-aloud. (See Chapters 27 and 28.)

Extending Understanding Through Performance

Above we discussed how the support provided by shared reading, choral reading, and readers’ theater and drama can lead children to reread a text and process it more deeply. Performance also gives students an opportunity to interpret a text vocally.

All of the above instructional contexts help children develop a broad foundation for processing texts effectively. Comprehending the fullest meaning of a text is the goal every time we read anything. We do not teach comprehension by applying one strategy to one book during one lesson: we help students learn how to focus on the meaning and interpretation of texts all the time, in every instructional context, each instance contributing in different ways to the same complex processing system.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROCESSING TEXTS**

- 1 Bring together a cross-grade-level group of colleagues to think about text experiences. You may want to have them work in small grade-level groups and then share as a whole group.
- 2 Use large chart paper divided into columns. As a group, consider (1) processing orally presented written texts; (2) processing written texts; and (3) acting on the meaning of texts after reading. These three actions occur across instructional contexts.
- 3 Have each group use their weekly schedules to discuss a week of instruction in their classroom. Make a list of all the processing opportunities students have in each of the three areas in the three columns on the chart paper.
- 4 Review the charts. Have the whole group participate in a larger discussion of how these opportunities can be expanded. Emphasize that there are specific ways of teaching for comprehending in each of these settings.